United Nations S/2013/612

Security Council

Distr.: General
16 October 2013

Original: English

Eighteenth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

I. Background

1. The current report is my eighteenth semi-annual report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It reviews and assesses the process of the implementation of the resolution since my previous report on the subject was issued on 18 April 2013 (S/2013/234). It notes the continued lack of progress on key provisions of the resolution, and highlights increasing concerns threatening the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon, including challenges to efforts to uphold that country's policy of disassociation from the Syrian crisis.

2. There were serious challenges to stability in Lebanon during the reporting period and further political polarization. In its presidential statement of 10 July (S/PRST/2013/9), the Security Council reaffirmed, inter alia, the importance of preserving the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon. It commended the efforts of the President of Lebanon, Michel Sleiman, in this regard and called on Lebanese leaders across the political spectrum and Lebanese of all communities to offer every possible support to the Lebanese Armed Forces as a national and neutral institution and central pillar of the country's stability. In response to acts of terrorism during this period, the Council also issued three press statements, on 9 July (SC/11101), 15 August (SC/11095) and 23 August (SC/11055), in which Council members appealed to all Lebanese to preserve national unity in the face of attempts to undermine the country's stability, and stressed the importance for all Lebanese parties to respect the policy of disassociation of Lebanon and refrain from any involvement in the Syrian crisis, consistent with their commitment in the Baabda Declaration.

3. Lebanon witnessed devastating terrorist incidents during the reporting period. On 9 July, a car bomb exploded in Bir al Abed, a mainly Shiite suburb of Beirut, injuring 53 people and causing extensive material damage. On 15 August, a car bomb explosion in Roweiss, another mainly Shiite suburb of Beirut, killed 27 people and injured 363. An unknown group calling itself the Brigades of Aisha, claimed responsibility and threatened further attacks. On 23 August, two car bombs exploded shortly after Friday prayers outside two mosques in Tripoli, killing 26 people and injuring 825 others. I strongly condemned the incidents, stressing the

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international community's continued support to Lebanon and urging all Lebanese to remain united, rally around their State institutions and safeguard their country's security and stability.

4. The impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to affect the security and stability of Lebanon both directly and indirectly. Cross-border firing and shelling from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon continued, and Syrian government forces were responsible for further incursions and air strikes on Lebanese territory. On 25 May, Hizbullah publicly acknowledged its role in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Immediately following Hassan Nasrallah's speech, on 26 May two rockets were fired from within Lebanon at the mainly Shiite southern suburbs of Beirut, causing four casualties. President Sleiman renewed his calls for all Lebanese parties to disassociate themselves from the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and to respect the Baabda Declaration.

5. Following a serious episode of violence involving armed clashes in the southern city of Sidon on 23 and 24 June between supporters of a Salafist sheikh and the Lebanese Armed Forces, I condemned the attacks on the armed forces and stressed that all in Lebanon should fully respect the authority of the State and its institutions under the leadership of President Sleiman.

6. Since my previous report, the number of Syrian nationals fleeing to Lebanon from the violence in their country has doubled to over 800,000 refugees registered or awaiting registration in Lebanon as at 1 October. There has also been a significant increase in the influx into Lebanon of Palestinian refugees who live in the Syrian Arab Republic. Lebanon, the smallest and most vulnerable of the countries neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic, continues to host the largest number of refugees and is facing enormous humanitarian, socioeconomic and political challenges as a consequence.

7. On 31 May, Parliament voted to extend its mandate until 20 November 2014, thereby postponing the elections scheduled for June. The Prime Minister-designate, Tammam Salam, continued his efforts to form a government. There was no resumption of the National Dialogue in the reporting period. On 2 August, a decree extended the terms of the Commander and the Chief of Staff of the Lebanese Armed Forces for two years, thereby ensuring institutional continuity in the army.

II. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

8. Since Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) was adopted on 2 September 2004, several of its provisions have been implemented as highlighted in my previous reports. Presidential and parliamentary elections took place in a free and fair manner. The Syrian Arab Republic withdrew its troops and military assets from Lebanon in April 2005. Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic established full diplomatic relations in 2009.

9. President Sleiman and caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati continued to affirm during the reporting period the respect of Lebanon for all United Nations resolutions. However, the escalating crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and its corresponding impact on Lebanon continued to limit progress in the implementation of the outstanding provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) and other Security Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon. A rise in violence within the country and the

political stalemate that continued to characterize the reporting period made progress on resolution 1559 (2004) still more difficult, though more necessary than ever.

10. The delineation of the Syrian-Lebanese border, which was strongly encouraged by the Security Council in its resolution 1680 (2006), has still not taken place. Moreover, the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias continue to pose a threat to the stability of the country and the region, and highlight the need for the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces to intensify their efforts to reach a full monopoly on the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout Lebanon.

11. My representatives and I have remained in regular contact with all parties in Lebanon over the reporting period, as well as with relevant regional and international leaders. I met President Sleiman and caretaker Prime Minister Mikati in New York on 25 September and 3 October respectively, on the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon, which I convened. Participants in the meeting expressed appreciation for the leadership of President Sleiman in seeking to uphold the sovereignty, unity and stability of Lebanon and the continuity of State institutions, to promote dialogue and to safeguard Lebanon from the impact of the Syrian crisis.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

12. Resolution 1559 (2004) aims at strengthening the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, in line with the Taif Agreement of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon committed themselves. This objective has remained the highest priority of my efforts to facilitate the implementation of all resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.

13. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request made by the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border. I continue to call upon the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to achieve the full delineation of their common border. However, given the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, no tangible steps were taken by either side during the period towards the delineation and demarcation of the border between the two countries.

14. The delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Lebanon remain essential elements in guaranteeing national sovereignty and territorial integrity. They also remain critical steps to facilitate proper border control. The complex security situation along the Syrian-Lebanese border in the current circumstances, including ongoing reports of cross-border fighting and movement of arms and people, further underlines the continued urgency of demarcating the border. While acknowledging the bilateral nature of border delineation, progress on this matter remains an obligation of the two countries under Security Council resolution 1680 (2006), derived from 1559 (2004).

15. From 28 April to 1 October, at least 13 cross-border shelling incidents from the Syrian Arab Republic were reported in northern Lebanon causing at least one fatality and a dozen injuries. During the same period, at least one cross-border

incursion by Syrian government forces was reported. Three rockets originating from the Syrian Arab Republic also landed in the eastern Bekaa area of Lebanon during this period. On 5 and 12 June, Syrian army helicopters fired missiles in the Arsal region of Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces stated that their units in that area had taken the defensive measures necessary to react immediately to any further violation. In a letter to the Security Council on 18 June, President Sleiman protested the infringement of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon by the conflicting Syrian parties. In its presidential statement of 10 July, the Security Council underscored its growing concern at the marked increase in cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon, which caused death and injury among the Lebanese population, as well as in incursions, abductions and arms trafficking across the Lebanese-Syrian border.

16. The continued occupation by the Israel Defense Forces of the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line stands in violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). My representatives and I continue to engage closely with both parties, with a view to facilitating the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area in implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

17. There has been no progress either in relation to the issue of the Shab'a Farms area. Neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel has responded with regard to the provisional definition of the area contained in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), issued on 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641).

18. Unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets, of the Israel Defense Forces continued to fly over Lebanon on an almost daily basis. These overflights are violations of Lebanese sovereignty and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). The Government of Lebanon has repeatedly protested these violations. I have deplored them and demanded that they cease immediately. Israeli authorities claim in turn that these overflights are carried out for security reasons.

B. Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

19. The Government of Lebanon has reiterated to the United Nations its intention to extend State authority over all Lebanese territory, as called for by the Taif Agreement and resolution 1559 (2004). The Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces have played a crucial role in implementing this commitment, under difficult security circumstances. However, the ability of the Lebanese State to fully exercise its authority over all of its territory continues to be challenged, underlining the need for continued international support to the authorities and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

20. Several incidents have challenged domestic security. Most of the incidents are linked directly or indirectly to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has exacerbated sectarian tensions. There is also heightened concern at the involvement of Lebanese fighters in the Syrian Arab Republic, notably Hizbullah, especially in the battle of Qusayr. On 20 June, President Sleiman called on Hizbullah fighters to return to Lebanon. On 1 August, he stressed that the army's duty was difficult if one or more Lebanese actors were involved in extraterritorial conflicts, thereby importing external crises.

21. The intensification of the battle for the Syrian town of Qusayr on 19 May led to a new, sustained round of violence in Tripoli between the residents of a predominantly Sunni neighbourhood and those of an adjacent Alawite area, resulting in at least 36 fatalities, including the deaths of two members of the Lebanese security forces, and over 200 people injured. The Lebanese army deployed to contain the fighting. An attack on a Lebanese Armed Forces checkpoint in the northern Beka'a valley on 28 May led to the deaths of three soldiers. In an additional attack, on 6 June, two assailants were killed when they assaulted another Lebanese Armed Forces checkpoint. At least two roadside bombs believed to be targeting members of Hizbullah exploded on 7 July near Hermel, injuring two soldiers and a civilian. Another roadside bomb exploded, on 16 July, near the Masnaa crossing into the Syrian Arab Republic, reportedly injuring two members of Hizbullah. On 11 August, the mayor of Arsal was hurt when his convoy came under fire in the town of Al Labweh.

22. On 4 August, an explosion in Daraya killed the bomber and led to the discovery of ready-to-use improvised explosive devices, maps and future targets. The Lebanese Armed Forces arrested three gunmen on 8 August who were attempting to cross the border through Arsal, confiscating weapons and a suicide vest. On 18 August, four people were arrested in connection with the discovery of a vehicle containing 250 kg of explosives in Naameh, south of Beirut. Separately, on 9 August, two Turkish pilots were kidnapped on the road from Beirut International Airport in an incident believed to be linked to the abduction of Lebanese pilgrims in the Syrian Arab Republic.

23. These violent incidents are a reflection of the widespread proliferation of weapons held by non-State actors and the significant threat such weapons pose to domestic peace and security. Efforts to increase the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces and their ability to address multiple challenges, including to internal security, continued. On 15 May, the Lebanese Armed Forces introduced their capabilities development plan to representatives of troop-contributing countries and other Member States to promote the plan. Efforts continued to be made to explore, with the Lebanese Armed Forces, the possibility of establishing a coordination mechanism for achieving donor support for the capabilities development plan and the strategic dialogue, which is a separate but integral component of the plan. In its presidential statement, the Security Council encouraged increased international support to the Lebanese Armed Forces, in response to their recently launched capabilities development plan, as well as in the context of the strategic dialogue between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). It noted the particular urgency of assistance, which would strengthen the Lebanese Armed Forces' capabilities with respect to border control. On 25 September, the International Support Group for Lebanon welcomed the five-year capabilities development plan of the army and encouraged greater international support for it.

24. Over the reporting period, the situation in the area of operations of UNIFIL remained generally stable. On 7 August, four Israel Defense Forces personnel were injured in an explosion in the Labouneh area north of the Blue Line. Hizbullah claimed responsibility for the explosions. Separately, on 22 August, four rockets were fired from a site south-east of Tyre in southern Lebanon towards Israel, two of which caused material damage in Israel. The Abdallah Azzam Brigade claimed responsibility for the firing of the rockets. The Lebanese authorities condemned the

attack and its security agencies have detained two suspects. On 23 August, the Israel Defense Forces bombed a site adjacent to a base of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) at Naameh, south of Beirut, causing material damage but no casualties. Pending conclusion of these investigations, I will provide an update in the context of my reporting on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

25. With regard to the border of Lebanon with the Syrian Arab Republic, there continue to be reports of arms trafficking taking place in both directions. Several Member States have continued to express deep concern over the illegal transfer of weapons across these land borders. Israeli officials have stated that they would act to prevent advanced weapons systems from being transferred to Hizbullah from the Syrian Arab Republic. Senior representatives of Hizbullah, for their part, have maintained their position that they have no intention of acquiring chemical weapons. In this context, I noted with grave concern reports of Israeli airstrikes around Damascus on 3 and 5 May and called on all concerned to strictly abide by international law, in particular in respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all the countries in the region. The Lebanese authorities have indicated that the land border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic remains difficult to control but that the Lebanese Armed Forces are deployed and have sought to tighten control along the border, to the best of their ability. While the United Nations has no independent means of verifying reports of cross-border arms smuggling, I have repeatedly expressed my concerns about the risks to both countries.

26. In order to address ongoing cross-border incidents and in the context of reports of arms smuggling, there remains an urgent need to improve the management and control of the land borders of Lebanon. This is also necessary to avoid armed groups and militias in Lebanon from expanding their weapons arsenal, which constitutes a threat to domestic and regional peace. Donor coordination with the authorities on integrated border management is ongoing. I reiterated calls on all States to renew efforts to meet their obligations under Security Council resolutions to take the necessary measures to prevent the transfer of arms to groups outside the control of the Government of Lebanon.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

27. In its resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called for the disarming and disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. This remains a key provision of the resolution that has not yet been implemented. It reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves in the Taif Agreement, which led at the time to Lebanese militias, with the exception of Hizbullah, giving up their weapons. Given the current domestic context of increased sectarian tensions and the growing impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon, it is critical that this agreement be preserved and implemented by all in order to avoid the spectre of a renewed confrontation among the Lebanese.

28. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias within the country continue to operate outside of the control of the Government in serious violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside Government control, the armed component of Hizbullah is the most significant and most heavily armed Lebanese militia in the country. The

maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups poses a serious challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. In addition, a number of Palestinian armed groups continue to operate in the country inside and outside the refugee camps. Furthermore, in recent months there have been unconfirmed reports of possible infiltration or presence of extremist elements in Lebanon.

29. I have repeatedly expressed my deep concern to Lebanese leaders about the serious risks these armed groups pose to the stability of the country and the region. I have urged them to address this matter without further delay, as it is their obligation to do so under Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). In a democratic State, it is a fundamental anomaly that a political party maintains its own militia. Nonetheless, Hizbullah has continued to acknowledge openly that it maintains and expands a substantial military capacity separate from that of the Lebanese State. It also claims that its arms serve as a deterrent against potential aggression from Israel. Meanwhile, Israeli officials have expressed concern at the alleged maintenance by Hizbullah of unauthorized weapons or armed personnel presence in civilian areas in the south of Lebanon.

30. During the reporting period, yet again, no tangible progress was made towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in the Taif Agreement and resolution 1559 (2004). Since the adoption of that resolution in 2004, no concrete steps have been taken to address this crucial issue, which lies at the heart of the sovereignty and the political independence of Lebanon. Nonetheless, several Lebanese groups and individuals continue to speak up against Hizbullah's maintenance of a military arsenal, which they consider to be a destabilizing factor in the country and contradictory to democracy. Many Lebanese see the continued existence of such arms, which could be used within Lebanon for political reasons, as an implicit threat.

31. I have long supported the National Dialogue as the best way to address the issue of arms and achieve the ultimate goal of no weapons or armed forces in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese State. The National Dialogue has not resumed during the reporting period despite President Sleiman's renewed calls for its resumption.

32. In the south of Lebanon, violence erupted in the city of Sidon, where, on 23 and 24 June, armed clashes occurred between supporters of a Salafist sheikh and the Lebanese Armed Forces. The armed forces responded quickly to the attack and secured the area, but not before 16 soldiers were killed and 50 others wounded. This includes at least two soldiers killed in a related attack on army checkpoints at the entrances to the Ein el-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp outside Sidon.

33. During the period under review, the security situation in the Palestinian camps remained generally stable but tense. Leaders in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon continued to work together, and with the Lebanese authorities, to maintain order against the backdrop of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. In a visit to Lebanon on 3 July, the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, stressed the need for Palestinians in Lebanon to disassociate themselves from the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and from any internal tensions in Lebanon.

34. Humanitarian conditions for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remained dire, and an additional 47,000 Palestinian refugees arrived in Lebanon from the Syrian

Arab Republic. These additional refugees are placing tremendous pressure on the assistance efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Moreover, tensions are increasing between the Palestine refugees who have been residing in Lebanon and those arriving from the Syrian Arab Republic, as the latter are deemed to be adding to the burden on the already limited resources available for Palestine refugees. The United Nations has continued to urge the Lebanese authorities to improve the conditions in which Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon. This should be done without prejudice to the eventual resolution of the Palestinian refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement in the region, and bearing in mind the detrimental effects of dismal living conditions on the wider security situation.

35. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps continues to challenge the ability of Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty over its territory. In spite of the decision taken in 2006 in the context of the National Dialogue and confirmed in subsequent sessions, no progress has been made with regard to dismantling the military bases of PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifada in the country. All but one of those bases are located along the Syrian-Lebanese border. Their presence continues to undermine Lebanese sovereignty and governmental authority and makes delineation of the border more difficult. It poses a serious challenge, given the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, to the effective control of the eastern border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. I have reiterated my calls to the Lebanese authorities for the implementation of earlier decisions made in the context of the National Dialogue, specifically those related to the dismantling of PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifada military bases, and to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate with these efforts in good faith.

III. Observations

36. I remain deeply disappointed at the lack of further tangible progress towards the implementation of the remaining provisions of resolution 1559 (2004). Lebanon continues to face serious challenges to its stability and security, both internally and along its borders with the Syrian Arab Republic, including from arms smuggling and additional influxes of refugees. I am also concerned that continued stagnation in the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) could lead to the erosion of provisions already implemented and contribute to the further deterioration of the stability of Lebanon. I reiterate my firm conviction that it is in the best interest of Lebanon and the Lebanese to make progress towards the full implementation of the resolution for the long-term stability of the country and the region.

37. The violence that has taken place in parts of Lebanon during the reporting period, including the large-scale terrorist bombings in Beirut and Tripoli, further highlights the need for renewed unity and determination across the political spectrum to prevent a slide into conflict. There should be no return to impunity in Lebanon and those responsible should be brought to justice.

38. When they voted on 31 May to extend the Parliament's mandate, members of the Lebanese Parliament cited the tense security situation. It is regrettable that agreement on a new election law did not prove possible. It is imperative, in order to build confidence and stability in Lebanon and sustain the long-standing national democratic tradition central to it, that the political parties resume efforts to agree on

arrangements for parliamentary elections. A revived sense of commitment will be needed.

39. It is self-evident that, to address the multiple challenges it faces, Lebanon requires an empowered Government. The initial unanimity among political parties with regard to the selection of Prime Minister designate Tammam Salam sent a positive signal to the people of Lebanon and the international community. I encourage the leaders of Lebanon to finalize the formation of a government without further delay. In the meantime, it is important that the President and his caretaker ministers receive support as they seek to address the most pressing issues, in particular with regard to security and humanitarian matters. It is critical that the leaders of Lebanon strengthen national institutions and the confidence of all communities in their willingness to act in a manner that protects Lebanon from the impact of the Syrian crisis and provides security and stability throughout the country.

40. The urgent formation of a government is particularly critical in the context of the humanitarian crisis. Lebanon and its people deserve the highest praise for having maintained an open door to Syrians and in most cases to Palestinian refugees fleeing the violence in the Syrian Arab Republic. The number of refugees continues to rise with economic, social and security implications that require the ongoing attention of the Government. I continue to encourage the Lebanese authorities to ensure that fully empowered institutional structures are in place to carry out effective planning, delivery and coordination responsibilities. The United Nations and the Government have worked closely together on the appeal for Lebanon contained in the new regional response plan launched on 7 June. I call upon all Governments and funds to provide assistance generously and without delay in response to the revised appeal; in particular, I look to regional donors to assist where possible.

41. I remain deeply concerned about the reports of deepening tensions within Lebanon in the context of the continued impact of the Syrian crisis on the security and political dynamics in the country. I condemn the incidents in which civilians were reported to have been killed, injured or put at risk on the Lebanese side of the border owing to the actions of the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. I call upon all parties, in particular the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

42. I am also deeply concerned about the acknowledged increased participation in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic by Hizbullah and the risk of spillover in Lebanon. I call on all in the region to act responsibly and work towards lowering the tone of the rhetoric and calming tensions in the region. I am in consistent opposition to the transfer of arms and fighters from Lebanon to the Syrian Arab Republic to either side within the Syrian Arab Republic. I have repeatedly urged respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries in the region. I reiterate the paramount importance of preventing a dangerous spillover of the conflict across borders. I have encouraged strict adherence to the Baabda Declaration and called on all Lebanese leaders and parties to renew their commitment to it and keep Lebanon safe from conflict.

43. Of equal concern are the threats made by external actors according to which they would bring their fight to Lebanon in response to Hizbullah's involvement and calls from inside Lebanon to engage in jihad in the Syrian Arab Republic. This poses a very real risk to national security and stability. Noting the statements of the

Security Council, I commend the efforts of President Sleiman to uphold the policy of disassociation of Lebanon, which remains essential to protecting Lebanon from any further impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate my call for all Lebanese parties to fully respect that policy, which ensures that Lebanon remains neutral with regard to external conflicts, consistent with its commitment to upholding the principles of the Baabda Declaration.

44. I have repeatedly cautioned that the widespread proliferation of weapons outside the control of the State, combined with the continued existence of heavily armed militias, undermines the security of Lebanese citizens. The maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable, sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern, particularly as it creates an atmosphere of intimidation and represents a key challenge to the safety of Lebanese civilians and to the Government monopoly on the legitimate use of force. It also puts Lebanon in violation of its obligations under resolution 1559 (2004) and constitutes a threat to peace and stability in the region. I reiterate my call on Hizbullah and all other concerned parties to not engage in any militant activity inside or outside Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement and Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

45. I once again urge the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces to take all the measures necessary to prohibit Hizbullah from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacities outside the authority of the State, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004). I also call upon countries in the region that maintain close ties with Hizbullah to encourage the transformation of the armed group into a solely political party and its disarmament, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement and resolution 1559 (2004), in the best interest of Lebanon and regional peace and security.

46. I remain of the firm belief that the best way to address the disarmament of militias in Lebanon, in particular Hizbullah, is through a Lebanese-led cross-party political process. To this end, it is crucial that the National Dialogue, under the leadership of President Sleiman, resume, including on the draft national defence strategy presented at the most recent session, in September 2012. I also urge all parties to respect and implement earlier decisions made in the context of the National Dialogue, specifically those related to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifada military bases. The Syrian crisis should not be used as an excuse to ignore these responsibilities, but rather serve as an incentive for the necessary disarming and disbanding of militias.

47. The situation of Palestinian refugees in the camps remains a source of deep concern, in particular in the light of the additional strains that the Syrian crisis has placed on the camps in Lebanon. In this context, I welcome the affirmation by President Abbas during his visit to Lebanon of the need for leaders in the Palestinian camps to maintain order against the backdrop of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate the need to improve conditions in the camps, including through legislation to ease employment of Palestinians. Such progress would not prejudice the eventual resolution of the Palestinian refugee question in the context of a comprehensive regional peace agreement. I reiterate my call on donors to support UNRWA and its vital work in providing services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

48. I regret the absence of any progress on the border delineation and demarcation with the Syrian Arab Republic, which has a significant impact on border control. I

remain of the view that integrated border management will in the longer term contribute significantly to better control of the international borders of Lebanon and help to prevent the illegal transfer of arms to and from Lebanon. This has become even more pressing in the context of events in neighbouring Syrian Arab Republic. In this context, I welcome continued donor support for border management

49. I continue to deplore the continued violations by Israel of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, most conspicuously the flights over Lebanese territory by Israeli aircraft, including, during the present reporting period, a strike by the Israeli Defense Forces into Lebanon. I reiterate my call upon Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, and to cease its overflights in Lebanese airspace, which undermine the credibility of Lebanese security services and generate anxiety among the civilian population. They also greatly increase the risk of unintended consequences in an already very tense regional context.

50. Security incidents throughout Lebanon, including terrorist bombings, further highlight the fragility of the domestic environment and the need for the Lebanese authorities to intensify efforts to prevent the illegal use of weapons in the country, impose law and order, and prevent a return to impunity. These efforts remain more urgent given the political uncertainty in Lebanon and the continuing effects of the Syrian crisis. I commend the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces, which have continued to perform robustly in addressing several security challenges over the reporting period. I am also encouraged by the continued efforts of Member States to equip and train the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces at a time when the security demands on Lebanon are heavy. I welcome the progress made on the five-year capacity development plan for the armed forces and the efforts made to ensure that the plan includes the requirements and objectives of the strategic dialogue. I encourage all stakeholders, including the Government of Lebanon and international donors, to be forthcoming in their support for the plan when it is finalized.

51. The multiple challenges faced by Lebanon at present, largely as a result of the Syrian crisis, are increasingly apparent. It is necessary that the spirit of cooperation and respect for the principles of coexistence and security in Lebanon prevail, as must domestic peace without intimidation by armed groups, as set out in the Taif Agreement. Unity within the Lebanese political leadership is vital to prevent the country from being drawn into regional turmoil. I commend President Sleiman's leadership in upholding national unity and the continued efforts of caretaker Prime Minister Mikati in support thereof.

52. I am encouraged by the fact that the International Support Group for Lebanon, in its inaugural meeting on 25 September, reaffirmed international unity in support of stability in Lebanon, which lies at the heart of resolution 1559 (2004) and other relevant resolutions. I welcome the calls made on the need for strong, coordinated international support for Lebanon to help it continue to withstand the multiple current challenges to its security and stability.

53. I remain firmly committed to the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) for the sake of peace and security during a particularly difficult and challenging time in Lebanon. I, therefore, count on the continued commitment of the Government to its international obligations and call on all parties and actors to fully abide by

resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). I call on Member States to renew their efforts to support Lebanon in meeting its obligations under these resolutions, as the best way to advance the country's long-term prosperity and stability as a democratic State. I will continue my efforts towards the full implementation of these and all other Security Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.